

Field Report

Fort Ord Public Lands

■ 1.0 Summary

Fort Ord Public Lands is a former Army Installation on the Monterey Peninsula along the Pacific Ocean about 100 miles south of San Francisco. The BLM is responsible for the managing Fort Ord Public Lands. The BLM's primary goal is to protect more than 35 species of rare plants and animals and their native coastal habitats. Fort Ord Public Lands also provide visitors with the experience of the Monterey Peninsula as it was more than a century ago and offers a variety of passive recreation activities to visitors.

Amenities for visitors include more than 50 miles of paved and unpaved roadways and trails for hiking, dog walking, mountain biking, roadway biking, and horseback riding. Fort Ord also provides the opportunity for wildlife viewing as songbirds, hummingbirds, birds of prey, deer, bobcats, and other small mammals can be seen in their natural habitats. Wildflowers appear from February to May with many native plants continuing to bloom into the late summer (see Figure 1). Currently, 10 acres of the lands have access to a trail system. Hunting and overnight camping are not permitted.

Figure 1. Landscape at Ford Ord



Access to Fort Ord is limited to bicyclists and pedestrians with local agency use of private vehicles permitted (BLM staff). Private vehicles are banned/restricted from using roadways within the southern part of the facility. There is limited private vehicle access on paved roads in northern portions of the facility. There are a number of small, unpaved areas for visitor parking primarily along State Highway 68 to the south of the Fort Ord Public Lands. Signage at these parking lot locations is poor and confusing to the average (and potential) visitor. For example, signs are not posted at locations that describe the amenities and activities allowed on Fort Ord Public Lands. Large portions of the Public Lands are also not open to the public due in large part to safety issues related to unexploded Army ordnance.

Even though there is consistent use of the Public Lands for each season throughout the year, there is limited need for implementation of both short- and long-term Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) for several reasons including:

- Current visitation is low with approximately 18,000 persons visiting the site annually;
- Future visitation is not expected to increase dramatically over the next 10 to 20 years;
- Activities are widely dispersed within the facility and therefore it is difficult to target applicable ATS strategies;
- Vehicular access in the southern part of the facility will continue to be banned in the short and long-term;
- Monterrey Transit, the local transit operator, does not plan to provide future service to the Public Lands; and
- Future shuttle services have not been planned for implementation in the Fort Ord Reuse Plan or independently by the BLM.

Potential transportation improvements other than ATS strategies could be implemented to better serve the Public Lands. These strategies primarily would include improving parking lot infrastructure at key access locations for pedestrians and bicyclists along State Highway 68. Improvements might include paving and striping of primary parking lots, posting of detailed signs at the trailhead locations adjacent to primary and other parking lots, and developing and distributing detailed marketing materials about the recreational amenities and activities available to potential visitors.

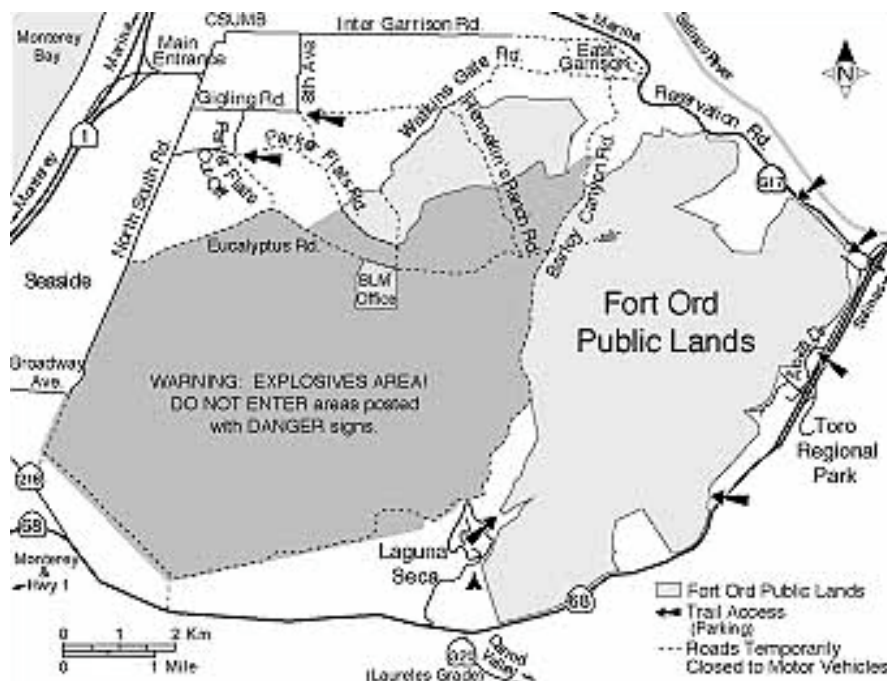
■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

Fort Ord is a former Army Installation located on the Monterey Peninsula along the Pacific Ocean in northern Monterey County, California, and approximately 100 miles south of San Francisco. As shown in Figure 2, portions of the Fort Ord public lands are within the cities of Marina, Del Rey Oaks, Monterrey, and Sand City. Primary visitor access to and from the installation is from State Highway 68.

2.2 Administration and Classification

The Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) oversaw the conversion of Fort Ord from military base to public lands. The BLM administers Fort Ord Public Lands. Several local communities are also working with the BLM including the local city and county agencies, U.S. Army, and Monterrey Transit.

Figure 2. Location of the Fort Ord Public Lands

2.3 Physical Description

Fort Ord occupies approximately 28,000 acres adjacent to the Cities of Marina, Seaside, Sand City, Del Rey Oaks, and Monterey, and Monterey Bay (a national marine sanctuary). The Southern Pacific Railroad and State Highway 1 (also known as State Route 1) cross the western section of Fort Ord, separating the beachfront from the majority of the installation. Fort Ord is bounded on the east by undeveloped land. Of the total Fort Ord acreage, 73 percent (approximately 20,000 acres) is in unincorporated Monterey County, 15 percent (approximately 4,100 acres) is within the Seaside city limits, and 12 percent (approximately 3,400 acres) is within the Marina city limits.

Trails wind around seasonal wetlands, also known as vernal pools, and through mature coast live oak forests. Fort Ord has the largest and best remaining example of maritime chaparral and there are views of the Salinas River Valley to the Monterey Bay and beyond.

2.4 Mission and Goals of the National Historic Site

The FORA prepared the Reuse Plan for Fort Ord pursuant to the provisions of Senate Bill 899 to guide the development of the Former Military Reservation. The Fort Ord Reuse process was designated a national model for base conversion in 1993. The BLM continues responsibility for protecting historic or cultural resources, endangered species, wetlands, and their native coastal habitats. Fort Ord Public Lands provide an excellent outdoor classroom for environmental education and scientific research.

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

Fort Ord Public Lands accommodates visitor's year-round with 50 miles of roads and trails available for hiking, bicycling and horseback riding. All on-site bicycle and pedestrian activity is restricted to signed roads and trails. There is no camping or hunting in Fort Ord. Approximately 18,000 persons visit the facility annually. Visitation is highest in February and March. There are competitive events, typically mountain biking and other race events, held on the Public Lands from February through June every year. Two major mountain bike events occur on BLM lands every year with up to 3,500 competitors for each event.

Visitors to the Public Lands are primarily interested in accessing the outdoor and recreational facilities of the facility. Visitors are also primarily local, from the Monterey Peninsula and Salinas areas. Limited regional visits occur during the course of the year as travelers on the coast highway (Highway 101 and Highway 1) stop and access the facility.

Local visitors tend to stay for not more than two hours while non-local visitors tend to stay longer, anywhere from three to five hours. The average party size typically is about two and one-half persons. There is a weekly mountain biking group that meets once a week with anywhere from 15 to 20 participants. Most visitors, being local, are repeat visitors and some access the Public Lands up to three times per day.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Passenger vehicles are restricted from using Fort Ord roadways other than for BLM and other agency use. For example, the facility contains a "Mock City" used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for urban assault practice. FBI vehicles use the roadways to access the "Mock City" for practice and typically the FBI practices every weekend during the year.

Hikers, dog walkers, joggers, and mountain bikers are restricted to paved and unpaved roadways. Typical visitor access for these uses is from the unpaved parking lots adjacent to State Highway 68. Other, unofficial parking location along State Highway 68 are also used by visitors to access the facility. Mountain bike clubs currently use Public Lands trails on a weekly basis. Access for this club does not appear to be a significant transportation issue. Two sponsored mountain bike races occur twice a year with up to 3,500 participants for each event. For these events, transportation services are provided by the sponsoring agencies.

School buses are also used to transport university students and other school age children to the Public Lands for interpretive programs. In some cases, BLM vans, holding approximately six to eight persons are also used to transport school age children to the facility. Typically, most university students use their own means to access the Public Lands.

Laguna Seca is a raceway located adjacent to State Highway 68 and to the Fort Ord Public Lands. On race days, typically held over several weekends during the year, motorists sometimes park their vehicles on BLM land. Traffic congestion on race days often occurs on State Highway 68 and Highway 101, and often impacts visitor access to Fort Ord. Laguna Seca races typically occur on weekends from January to September.

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Fort Ord has coordinated with various partners in the Monterey Bay area regarding activities within the Public Lands. These efforts have included:

- Working with area cities and the FORA to describe the recreational facilities and activities of the Public Lands;
- Discussing options to open currently closed BLM roadways on Fort Ord Public Lands to help reduce congestion and parking constraints generated on weekends by the Laguna Seca raceway;
- Marketing efforts to work with the local University to provide better access and material to students about the recreational activities of the Public Lands; and
- Transporting school age children to Public Lands for periodic interpretive programs to better understand the wildlife and ecology of the facility.

Monterey Transit runs service on roadways adjacent to the Public Lands but is not expected to increase levels of service to accommodate Fort Ord-specific users and their needs.

Consistent coordination of activities related to Fort Ord has been underway since the early 1990s and before culminating with the preparation of the Reuse Plan for Fort Ord in 1993. Local agencies involved with the BLM in Reuse activities include the FORA, California Department of Public Parks and Recreation, California National Guard, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), U.S. Army, and many other local agencies and entities.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The Fort Ord Reuse Plan is being implemented by the BLM and other associated local agencies. Portions of this Plan are being implemented to ensure that the natural and cultural resources of Fort Ord are maintained and preserved. Ongoing activities conducted by the BLM include:

- Retaining open space to enhance the appearance of the primary gateways to the facility;
- Promoting public awareness and education concerning the biological resources of the facility; and
- Preserving and protecting historically significant resources of the facility.

The BLM is conducting these ongoing activities as part of the overall mission of the facility to protect the historic or cultural resources, endangered species, wetlands, and their native coastal habitats of the Public Lands.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The BLM will continue to promote passive recreational activities for local, regional, and out-of-state visitors. Recreational conditions will also improve as the BLM proactively markets these outdoor activities to both local and non-local visitors. In relation to BLM plans to remove unexploded Army ordnance, large portions of the Public Lands will soon be open to the public for recreational activities including an expansion of the trail system. Mountain bike riding clubs and races will also be consistently part of the Fort Ord recreational landscape with expected increases in these types of activities in the future.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Unit Plans

The Fort Ord Reuse Plan currently serves as the primary vision document for the Fort Ord Public Lands. The FORA has also prepared an executive summary about the reuse plan and how it will help create the future of Monterey County.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

Agency coordination has related to the Fort Ord Reuse Plan that has been underway since the early 1990s and before. Local agencies involved with the BLM in Reuse, including transportation planning activities, include the FORA, California Department of Public Parks and Recreation, California National Guard, Caltrans, U.S. Army, and many other local agencies and entities.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need

5.1 Magnitude of Need

Since typical weekday and weekend usage is currently low and also predicted to be low in the future, there will be little need for a short- and long-term ATS. For a variety of other reasons, short- and long-term ATS implementation should not be a priority because:

- Activities are widely dispersed within the facility and therefore difficult to target applicable ATS strategies;
- Vehicular access in the southern part of the facility will continue to be banned;
- Monterrey Transit, the local transit operator, does not plan to provide future service to Public Lands; and
- Future shuttle services have not been planned for implementation in the Fort Ord Reuse Plan or independently by the BLM.

Visitors will continue to access the facility in the future using the parking lot facilities along State Highway 68.

5.2 Feasible Alternatives

A steady but low number of recreational visitors already have good access to the Fort Ord Public Lands using current transportation modes, typically parking in lots along State Highway 68 that provide bicycle or pedestrian access. The majority of local visitors are also within biking or walking distance of the Public Lands and therefore do not require vehicle or ATS systems to access the facility. Restrictions of private vehicles using roadways within the primary recreation area also reduce the potential feasibility of ATS.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

Fort Ord Disposal and Reuse Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Volume 1, December 1992.

Fort Ord Reuse Authority. Fort Ord Reuse Plan, Public Draft, Volume 1: Context and Framework, May 1996.

Fact Sheet, Fort Ord Public Lands.

Base Map, Recipients of Parcels on Former Fort Ord Lands, May 14, 1997.

■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Eric Morgan, Lands Manager, Fort Ord Public Lands